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TIPS AND TRICKS FOR

SEARCHING FAMILYSEARCH

The purpose of this session is explore the options and search parameters available in FamilySearch and then point out some unexpected search behaviors which require more thorough and alternative search techniques.

# Searching on FamilySearch.org

There are various search screens with different fields as part of FamilySearch.org. This presentation will focus on searching Historical Records. You should be aware that there are also searches for FamilyTree, Genealogies, Catalog, Books, and Wiki. These are all outside of the scope of tonight’s presentation and will not be covered.

You should also note that there are several different searches within Historical Records.

Each may have some unique ways of conducting a search and of presenting the results. Thus, it helps to know how each search works.

# Search Historical Records

When you first select Search records, there are seven fields displayed (one of which is faded out). These are first names, last names, Birthplace, Birth year range from, Birth year range to, Country, and State or Province (not available until you specify the country). You can get more fields to search by clicking on Marriage, Residence, Death, Any, Spouse, Parents, Other Person, Location, Type of record, Batch number, or Film number.

Generally, the more fields you enter, the more likely a person who matches everything you enter will come up, but also the more fields you enter, the less likely it is that you will get a match which doesn’t contain all of the information or which has some minor variation in one of the search fields.

You should be aware that:

1. FamilySearch uses a table of known variations for names. Thus, FamilySearch knows that Elizabeth, Lisbeth, Betsy, Liz, Betty, Beth, Lizzie and several other names are variations of the same name, and will automatically include Elizabeth in the results when you search for Betty. They also have a table for surname variations. Sometimes, you get too many hits because of the variations. For example, Sausmarez has many valid spellings, but a search for this name also includes hundreds of Sismero in the results, which makes it very hard to pull out the fewer “real” hits.
2. First names include middle names. Adding a middle name makes the search present results for any of the names included in the first name field, and for any initials used which match any of the first names entered. Thus a search for Anthony James as first names and Smith as last names will be a match for A. C. Smith or N. J. Smith, because at least one of the initials matches one of the first names you entered.
3. Place names have been standardized. Thus, when a suggestion is made for a place name, you should accept it – even though it is spelled exactly like what you entered. Clicking on the suggested entry allows for variations of that place name to be included in your search results.
4. Once you click on search and get results you can filter your results to focus in on your desired results. You can add search parameters (the items above the blue ***Update*** button). The items below the blue ***Update*** button are filters. As you click on one of the filters, it will show you the number of results for each of the filter choices. After selecting a place filter, you may also be allowed to filter more narrowly. See the last bullet in the next section for an example.

# Tricks and Solutions

Search results are often too many to be able to look at them all. Don’t just read the first screen and give up. There are ways to narrow down your search or to broaden your search. For example:

* You may want to omit the first name just in case there was a misspelling that isn’t treated as a variant. You may want to try checking the box for exact spelling. Choosing exact spelling is dangerous and may filter out the entry you need, but also may bring to the forefront the desired entry. When using exact spelling, I usually do several searches, one for each of the variant spellings.
* You may want to omit the surname (either when you only know the maiden name or when there are just too many – like Smith or Jones). You should then add some other search parameters or use filters such as place, or an event date.
* You may want to do a new search of just a specific collection. The reason to do this is that standards used by FamilySearch may not mesh well with how another web site set up their database. One good example is Find A Grave. For some reason, FamilySearch often misses people who are in the database (all of which is on FamilySearch). What you can do is use a separate search screen designed just for that database. Do this from the main search screen, where the right side lists the databases individually. When searching a single collection from the search screen for that database, you may get results you will never see when doing a general all database search on FamilySearch – even when you use filters properly.
* You may choose to narrow your search by collection. If you have already found the family in several censuses, but are missing one in the middle, click on ***Collections*** (either on the side or as a tab at the top – they do the same thing). This gives you a list of record sets that the hits came from. You can then pick as many collections as you want. You click the specific census and Find a Grave and it will present results only from those two collections.
* Be aware that the place filters below the blue ***Update*** button often have drill down options. For example, you choose to restrict the results to United States. Then go back to the same filter and click it again to see a list of states within the US. Each state will also have a number of hits from that state after the name of the state. Pick your state, then you can click on the filter again to get a list of counties in that state, followed by the number of hits within that county. Filters are very powerful and often help me find that elusive entry!

# Summary

Searching is complex on any web site. There are field restrictions, assumptions, standards used, and many other variables. The real message of this presentation is try, try again using the powerful tools given you by FamilySearch.

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